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ABSTRACT

The characteristics and attitudes of 982 incoming freshmen who attended 2-day orientation programs at the University of Maryland, College Park, were compared to those of 566 incoming freshmen and 378 transfer students who attended 1-day orientation programs. The University New Student Census (UNSC), a 78-item questionnaire consisting of demographic and attitudinal items, was administered during the 2-day freshman orientations, while a shorter version of the UNSC consisting of 20 items, was administered to participants of the 1-day orientation programs. The shorter version included five items designed to gather information from transfer students. Unlike those who attended the 2-day sessions, students who attended the 1-day orientation programs tended to come from slightly less affluent families, planned to live off-campus, and planned to work at an off-campus job during the school year. Students also differed significantly in their reasons for deciding to go to college, for choosing the University of Maryland, College Park, in particular, and in the reasons they might foresee for withdrawing from the university. Students who attended the 1-day programs were also different in terms of the types of careers they chose and their plans after graduating from college. The average age of transfer students who attended the 1-day orientation was 22 years, and 50 percent of these students transferred from other 4-year colleges. Additional views and also characteristics of the respondents, including sex, race, and income are reviewed. (SW)

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A Comparison of the Characteristics and Attitudes of Freshman and Transfer Students Attending Different Orientation Programs at the University of Maryland

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A COMPARISON OF THE CHARACTERISTICS AND ATTITUDES OF FRESHMAN AND TRANSFER STUDENTS ATTENDING DIFFERENT ORIENTATION PROGRAMS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

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SUMMARY

The characteristics and attitudes of 982 incoming freshmen who attended two-day orientation programs were compared to those of 566 incoming freshmen and 378 transfer students who attended one-day orientation programs . Unlike those who attended the two-day sessions, students who attended the one-day orientation programs tended to come from slightly less affluent families, planned to live off-campus, and planned to work at an off-campus job during the school year.

Students also differed significantly in their reasons for deciding to go to college, why they chose the University of Maryland, College Park, in particular, and in the reasons they might forsee for withdrawing from the University. Students who attended the one-day programs were also different in terms of the types of careers they chose, and their plans after graduating from college.

The Orientation Office at the University of Maryland, College Park (UMCP) offers two basic programs for first time entering freshmen, a one-day and a two-day program. The one-day program emphasizes registration, with minimum attention to dealing with aspects of the prospective student's non-academic life, while the two-day program provides for a variety of experiences designed to help the students adjust to their new situation. Entering students may choose either the one-day or the two-day program. While the one-day program has become increasingly more popular with students, most of the information the University of Maryland, College Park, gathers about freshmen comes from the two-day program, primarily because of time constraints in the one-day program.

Thus the question is asked: Are entering students who are able to attend the two-day program similar to or different from entering students who attend the one-day program? Some students may be unable to attend the two-day program because of work committments or other financial reasons (e.g., the two-day programs are more expensive for students). These students, then, might differ from other entering students on demographic variables such as employment status and income, to name but a few. Thus data collected on the characteristics and attitudes of freshman students based on two-day orientation samples may not reflect a potentially large constituency of students.

As a result, program planning for campus activities and services may be ignoring the needs of large numbers of students. Further, administrators may have an incomplete picture of why students are choosing their particular institution, or why they may be withdrawing from it.

The Orientation Office is also concerned about differences in one-day and two-day participants, since their programming needs should be based on something other than the time they have available.

The purpose of this study was to compare incoming freshmen who attended a two-day orientation program with incoming freshmen and transfer students who attended a one-day orientation program in 1980. Transfer students were included as one of the comparison groups because they represent an expanding group in higher education, because they are known to be at least demographically different from traditional entering freshmen students, and to replicate a previous study (Feldman, Sedlacek & Wright, 1977) that found transfer students to be similar attitudinally to other entering students.

METHOD

Subjects. As part of an ongoing program of research, the University of Maryland, College Park (UMCP) collects data annually on the characteristics and attitudes of entering freshmen during freshman orientation programs. The two-day program sample for this study consisted of 982 incoming freshmen, while the one-day sample consisted of 566 incoming freshmen and 378 transfer students. Demographic data on these subjects will be discussed in the Results section of this report.

Materials: The University New Student Census (UNSC), a 78-item questionnaire consisting of demographic and attitudinal items, was administered during the two-day freshman orientations at UMCP. In order to accomodate the shorter length of the one-day orientation programs, a shorter version of the UNSC, a "mini-census" was developed. The mini-census is a 20-item questionnaire consisting of 15 items taken directly from the UNSC and 5 items geared specifically to gather information from transfer students (the latter included questions such as the type of school previously attended and length of interruption of study).

RESULTS

Corresponding items on the mini-census and the UNSC were compared across entering freshmen who attended the two-day and one-day orientation programs,

and transfer students, who also attended the one-day programs. Freshmen attending the one-day program were found to be significantly different from those attending the two-day orientation sessions on fourteen of the fifteen items, using a chi-square analysis with a significance level of .05.

For descriptive purposes the differences will be reported in terms of the percentage of students who chose a particular response on each item; in some cases percentages may not equal 100% due to rounding or "other" responses.

General Characteristics

In terms of the sex composition of the sample, more male students attended the one-day programs: 51% of the entering freshmen and 55% of the transfer students were male. During the two-day program, however, the sample was only 45% male.

In terms of race, there were more Asian entering freshmen attending the one-day sessions than the two-day sessions, 7% vs. 3%, respectively. The percentage of students in each racial group was as follows: the freshman two-day sample was 82% white, 11% black, 3% Asian, 3% Hispanic, and 2% other. The freshman one-day sample was 80% white, 10% black, 7% Asian, 2% Hispanic, and 1% other. American-Indian students made up less than one percent of each sample. There were fewer minorities among the transfer students, with 87% of the transfer sample being white.

The annual income of the families of one-day students was significantly less than that of the two-day students. The median income of the one-day freshman sample was $29,800, while the median income of the two-day sample was $32,475.

As had been expected, students attending the one-day orientation progrms were more likely to work than students attending the two-day program. Only 38% of the freshman one-day students and 32% of the transfer students did not plan to work during their first year at UMCP, compared to 51% of the two-day students. And

almost twice as many of the students attending the one-day or transfer student orientation indicated that they planned to work off-campus, 43% of the freshman one-day group and 48% of the transfer students compared to 25% of the two-day students.

When asked where they would be living during their first semester at UMCP, respondents from the one-day programs were less likely to live on campus than their two-day counterparts (see Table 1). Of the freshmen one-day students, 48% planned to live with parents or other relatives compared to only 26% of the two-day sample. Only 35% of the freshman one-day sample and 11% of the transfer students planned to live in University residence halls, compared to 60% of the two-day sample. Thirty-six percent of the transfer students, 8% of the one-day freshmen and 5% of the two-day group planned to share a house or apartment, while 9% of the transfers, 3 % of the one-day freshmen, and 1% of the two-day freshmen planned to live alone.

Compared to two-day respondents, one-day and transfer students were more likely to see academic involvement rather than social involvement as contributing most to their development within the past year. One-day students gave greater emphasis to such academic activities as course work (20% of the transfer students vs. 12% of the one-day freshman group, vs. 7% of the two-day freshman group), independent study or research (10% of the one-day group vs. 8% of the two-day group), and contact with teachers/counselors (9% of the one-day group vs. 7% of the two-day group), but gave less emphasis to such social activities as friendships made (14% of the one-day group vs. 20% of the two-day group), and dating, parties, etc. (15% of the one-day group vs. 22% of the two-day group). Only 6% of the transfer students cited dating and parties as important in their development. Respondents in each of the orientation programs, however, gave about equal import-

ance to job experience (23%) and working with non-political groups (5%) or political groups (2%).

Views of College and UMCP

For all three groups, getting a better job was the main reason for going to college (transfer students 40%, two-day freshmen 36%, and one-day entering freshmen 34%). Gaining a general education was the second most popular reason for all groups for going to college, but significantly more one-day students chose this option than did two-day students (29% of the one-day freshmen and 24% of the transfers vs. 18% of the two-day freshmen).

In terms of why students chose to attend UMCP in particular, significantly more of the one-day freshmen students chose UMCP because they wanted to live at home (14% vs. 8% of the two-day sample). The largest percentage of respondents, however, from both the one-day and two-day orientation programs, cited UMCP's good academic reputation (37% of the transfer students, 35% of the one-day freshmen, and 31% of the two-day freshmen). All samples also chose UMCP because of its low tuition (16%, 13%, and 15%, respectively).

Students were not well-informed about the University of Maryland on the whole, however, particularly in regard to the State of Maryland's ranking in per capita funding for higher education compared to the rankings of other states. In both the one-day and two-day orientation programs, fewer than 1% of the students correctly identified that Maryland is among the 10 states least supporting higher education. Students were typically quite idealistic. For example, 28% of the students in both freshman samples and 31% of the transfer students believed that Maryland was among the top 10 states supporting higher education.

On an item designed to gather information on retention, students were confronted with the statistic that nationally about 50% of all university students leave before receiving a degree (see Table 2). When asked to speculate about

possible reasons that they themselves might leave UMCP, students attending the one-day orientation were more likely to say they might leave to accept a good job compared to students attending the two-day program. Freshman one-day students were less likely to think they would leave because of the cost of education (10% vs. 16% of the freshman two-day sample) or because of a lack of scholastic ability (6% vs. 10%). However, in both samples the largest percentage of participants indicated that they were absolutely certain that they would remain for their degrees, with transfer students most likely to choose that option.

When asked about their plans after graduating from college, respondents in the one-day sample were more likely to cite beginning a career (56% of both freshmen and transfers vs. 47% of the participants in the two-day orientation) and less likely to cite getting married along with beginning a career (13% of the one-day freshmen and 12% of the transfers vs. 19% of the two-day freshmen).

Career Choices and Goals

Students in both samples were asked to specify occupations that reflected their current vocational goals (see Table 3). These were subsequently coded according to Holland's typology (1979) which reflects Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising and Conventional types of careers. Compared to the two-day orientation sample, students from the one-day programs were more likely to choose Realistic and Social careers and less likely to choose careers in the Investigative area.

The only item that did not significantly distinguish respondents from the one-day and two-day orientation programs concerned students' most important reasons for making a particular long-term career choice. In order of importance, students cited intrinsic interest in the field, high anticipated earnings, and working with people.

Data on Transfer Students Only

Fifty percent of the transfer students were coming from four-year colleges other than the University of Maryland, 45% were transferring from two-year

colleges, and 4% were transferring from other branches of the University of Maryland. The majority (79%) of transfer students had attended school one semester ago, 10% had attended within one year, 6% attended more than three years ago, 4% within the past two years, and 1% attended 3 years ago. The majority (85%) had transferred only once, 11% had transferred twice, 3% three times, and 1% more than three times. The mean number of semester credits completed was 54 (standard deviation 22.73). The average age of the transfer students who attended the one-day orientation was 22 (standard deviation 4.10).

DISCUSSION

The results indicate that students who attended orientation programs of different durations were different in characteristics and attitudes. Such differences may have ramifications for program planning for student services and administration.

The students typically seen in two-day orientation programs at UMCP expected to live in University residence halls, did not plan to work during the school year, and saw social involvement contributing more to their overall development than academic involvement. Programs and services designed for incoming students based on such norms may be ignoring the needs and characteristics of a large segment of the student population. The participants in one-day orientation programs seemed to reflect a different type of student: one who is somewhat less affluent, may be a commuter, one who plans to be on campus less because of the demands of a part-time job or living off-campus, one who sees academics as being more important in his/her overall development, more concerned with financial matters, and more likely to consider withdrawing from the University to accept a good job. Transfer students were particularly firm in their resolve to remain at the University and earn their degrees, and were not significantly different in demographic or attitudinal variables from their counterparts reported by Feldman et al. (1977).

The implications for those planning orientation programs are considerable. A much different focus should be made in the one and two-day programs. Additionally, planners may want to consider allocating some portion of their resources and services to the needs of students who attend the one-day programs, perhaps by giving more attention to the needs of students who do not live on campus, or by studying the enrollment and retention trends of various student populations.